

New Plays In for the Holidays

Actors in Foreground of Theater Interest Nowadays

Playwrights Are Doing So Little at Present to Engross the Public That the Players Come Inevitably Into the Spotlight.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.
WHO said that the gods disappear when the half gods come? The playwrights are doing just now so little to engross the public that the actors come inevitably into the foreground. If the theater is to be talked about they are the only thing about it that is in the least interesting. To be sure Zoe Akins has now stood her play "The Varying Shore" on its feet instead of head at the Hudson Theater, and the result is said to be diverting to a certain degree. The result is bound to be satisfying so long as Elsie Ferguson's unique beauty is revealed whether her play is on its head or its feet.

Then Clare Kummer is said to have enriched the dramatic and literary charms of "The Mountain Man," her latest play at Maxine Elliott's Theater, with three more scenes. It is most devoutly to be desired that the new ones may be not like the others and that they may after all contain something wittier than the *chef d'oeuvre*, which created such an uproar among the perfect Kummerites at the first performance.

It ran somewhat in this fashion: The girl asked the mountain boy "How high is the mountain?" Mountain boy responds—business of shyness and looking down at Brogan—that "it ain't as high as some mountains." Fly young city girl then is able to answer with all the concentrated sparkle of a Kummer flapper at her brightest. "Then other mountains are higher." Maybe after all it was not just like this. But it had just as depressing an effect on the unregenerate as if it had been. It is not given to all to penetrate the Kummer spirit at its most dazzling.

It shows what might be called the right spirit for the two gifted lady playwrights to keep on trying to get their plays right. It used to be said that George M. Cohan wrote his works at the rehearsal. He at least got through with the job by the time the curtain went up. Nowadays the first representation in New York seems to stand in the same relation to the ultimate form of the piece as the trials in Washington and Stamford used to. Mr. Cohan must have been an old fashioned playwright. Nowadays the dramas are evidently written after the first night.

But there always will be somebody to talk about acting so long as Ben-Ami is on view. Now the actor is with us again and is stirring the waters as of old. He probably will create less excitement than he did at the Greenwich Village Theater last year. As the jealous, maddened poet of "Samson and Delilah" he was much more able to reveal the characteristic qualities of what his admirers are accustomed to call his genius.

There was in that representation some indication of an effort at composition. The actor did not exert himself to reveal one phase of a character and then withdraw from all apparent effort to sustain anything like a consistent conception. He would not, in other words, wait from one scene that revealed his best qualities to another. The intervals seemed at the Plymouth Theater the other night to show the actor in rather arid stretches.

There were, moreover, some eloquent minutes for the actor in the study of the faithless wife in her first play. Ben-Ami, on the other hand, cavorted about in the most extraordinary manner at the Plymouth Theater on Tuesday. He uttered at arbitrary intervals in the play strange doglike sounds, swung his arms about, with the fingers always stretched out, leaped into the air and most mercilessly shoved the men about and handled the women quite as severely. It is, of course, quite impossible to venture any guess as to what it all meant.

If Mr. Ben-Ami should explain that all those thieves in the Jewish villages of Russia act in this manner he would, in a manner of speaking, "have us." The knowledge of how such men act is limited to few New York theatergoers. The actor's English is now good enough for his purposes, although he seems to have an unnecessary hard time getting the words out. Yet that is probably true of his speech in any language.

If Ben-Ami has nothing more interesting to give than "The Idle Inn" presents he will probably return soon to the theaters of his countrymen. Miss Augusta was quickly eclipsed by comparison with the best of the English speaking actors. Lou Tellegen could not survive the test. Bertha Kalich spends much of her artistic present acting for the appreciation of her countrymen. She is an artist now, although she never became so by following the traditions of the Yiddish playhouses. Whether as a singer in the chorus of the opera house at Lemberg or playing the leading roles in the repertoire of the fruitful Yiddish playwrights, she was gifted with a strong natural talent. When she exhibited it before the English speaking theatergoers of New York as *Fedora* she took the Sardou hurdles with the ease of a champion. There was no possible doubt of her power. There was no possible doubt that she hit high spots with a more or less resounding impact.

But the interludes were flat and crude. In all that indicated the finished artist skillfully bridging over the spaces between the peaks. Miss Kalich was lacking at that time. She gradually learned under the more exacting regimen of the English speaking stage to know that acting of the highest type does not consist in the overwhelming "big scene" or the thrilling climax. She became after a while a complete artist. Probably the same will happen to Ben-Ami after he has dwelt longer among better examples than he was ever accustomed to see in his own theater.

It is, after all, his uncommon good looks that in all probability prejudices so many quite unnecessarily in his favor as an artist. His interesting and oval face bears an almost constant expression of brooding melancholy. His features are well modeled and his black locks more Byronic than any Broadway actor has been blessed with in years. His black eyes are deep wells of feeling that may at any minute boil into passion. His figure is still boyish and his general appearance suggests youth.

Maybe after a while these gifts, combined with his genuine talent, may with the study of correct models place him in the niche in the temple of fame into which his admirers are now trying willy-nilly to make him stand upright.

What Is a Character Actor?
Bernard Shaw in one of his prefaces had something interesting to say about



A. E. MATTHEWS and SAM LIVESEY in "BULLDOG DRUMMOND," KNICKERBOCKER

what is mistakenly known as character acting. But it is not probable that his words of wisdom ever dissipated the prevailing misapprehension of the subject. It has always been the good fortune of Ben-Ami to act parts which give every actor at least the advantage of such material aids to success as the theater wardrobe and makeup box provide. Sidney Blackmer is just now enjoying the fruits of this kind of a character.

Whatever he may do in those three new scenes of Miss Kummer is not known to the writer, but in the others he plays a mountain boy with all the aid and comfort that linsey woolsey breeches and genuine mountain leather brogans can impart. He even clings so closely to the type that he goes far toward establishing the fact that Virginians do not brush their hair even on their wedding days. The general uncouthness of the country lad is well able to convey for the excellent reason that he has never been anything else on the stage.

He never before suggested either "Trimmed in Scarlet" or "Not So Long Ago" grace of manner or distinction of bearing or any of the traits beyond youth and a prepossessing appearance which the characters in those plays demanded. He was always more or less of a mountain boy, although he did not happen formerly to have the advantages of clothing to make the impression as strong as is in the play at Maxine Elliott's Theater.

Mr. Blackmer seems so much better as an actor than he ever was before because he is so lucky as to be playing "character" as the actors describe his present task. The playwright had prepared for him a role which happened to be exactly suited to his own physical and mental peculiarities, and he was able to draw himself up in a way that made the illusion still stronger. Such unions invariably spell success for the actor, and Mr. Blackmer is the triumphant note in "The Mountain Man."

Miss Mary Shaw's Methods.
Do the methods of actors change so much as they sometimes appear to, or does the viewpoint of the spectator



MME. OLGA PETROVA in "THE WHITE PEACOCK" COMEDY

MISS HELEN MACKELLAR in "BACK PAY" SHUBERT RIVIERA THEATRE

MISS CLARE EAMES in "AGLAIVINE and SELYSETTE" MAXINE ELLIOTT THEATRE

New Role in a Maeterlinck Play for Clare Eames

'Aglaivaine and Selysette' as Benefit for School Starts New Company.

The performance of Maurice Maeterlinck's "Aglaivaine and Selysette," first announced for December 30, for the benefit of the Higher School, has been postponed to Tuesday afternoon, January 3, at Maxine Elliott's Theater, the use of which has been donated by Lee Shubert. The performance will be given by the Afternoon Theater Company, a new group of players including Miss Clare Eames. Care has been taken in the artistic presentation of this play, which will be directed by Arthur Row. The costumes are designed by Charles Le Maistre, and William Sheafe, Jr., is the art director.

"Aglaivaine and Selysette" was first produced in London by Granville Barker at the Court Theater in 1905, with Walter Hampden as Moleander. The first production in America was given at the suggestion of Mr. Row by Miss Maria Leonard at her outdoor theater at Mount Kisco during the summer of 1913. On July 8, 1914, it was produced for the second time at the New York University under Mr. Row's direction. In addition to Miss Eames the Afternoon Theater Company includes Miss Eva Dallimore, Miss Mary Shaw, Gustav von Seiffertitz, Ian Keith, William Raymond, Miss Katherine Roberts and Caroline Newcombe. In addition to "Aglaivaine and Selysette" they intend to produce "Therese Raquin," by Zola, and "The Lady from the Sea," by Ibsen.

The Afternoon Theater Company plays will be presented at legitimate theaters at matinees that do not conflict with the time of performances of the regularly established theatrical productions, and will be offered at intervals commensurate with success. Stockholders will pay for seats just as the rest of the public, but they will share in profits over and above the cost of production. The plays must also profit at the box office or they will be discontinued.

Christmas Features At the Hippodrome

"Get Together" at the Hippodrome will start a series of Christmas week gala performances to-morrow afternoon. The features this year have been grouped into a scene entitled "The Workshop of Santa Claus," in which will be seen more than 300 persons and into which the variety artists, including Bert Levy, Perry Thurber Bird, the ice ballet, "The Red Shoes," with Charlotte, Katie Schmidt, Howard Nicholson, Paul Kreckow and Steele and Winslow, as well as the vaudeville quartet in reminiscences of minstrelsy and Clyde Cook's latest film comedy, "The Christmas Gift." A child in the audience at every matinee performance during the week will receive a doll dressed in a costume similar to one worn by a Hippodrome principal. The winning numbers are selected by Jennie, the shimmying elephant.

To Hear Christmas Concert by Wireless

For the first time in the advancing science of wireless radiographing and telephoning, Keith's vaudeville circuit will be free through the upper air a Christmas concert that can be caught at every one of the hundreds of thousands of wireless receiving stations now scattered over the country, embraced on roving ships at sea and in daily use at all of the military and naval hospitals and stations of the Government. The free Christmas gift and greeting from the Keith organization will be set on its swift and widening journey at 7 o'clock to-morrow morning from the Westinghouse Theater.

Miss Allyn Gillyn Recruit From Stock

Miss Allyn Gillyn, who plays the role of Josephine Johnson in Nature's "Nobleman" at the Forty-eighth Street Theater, in support of Louis Mann, is not a stranger to New York playgoers. Her previous engagement was with Chauncey Olcott, having supported him as leading woman in "Maoushia" for two seasons, including an engagement at the Park Theater.

'Abraham Lincoln' and Thurston in Brooklyn

At the Montauk Theater for the week beginning to-morrow afternoon William Harris, Jr., will present John Drinkwater's famous play, "Abraham Lincoln," with Frank McIllynn in the same part. There will be matinees on Wednesday and Saturday. The same cast which played at the Montauk last season returns with Mr. McIllynn.

Thurston, the magician, will be seen at the Majestic Theater this week, beginning with an extra matinee to-morrow, and the regular matinee Wednesday and Saturday.

Miss Ella Retford, English music hall comedienne, will head the bill at the Orpheum. Others will be Bert Errol, Anatol Friedland, Jack Osterman and Glenn Jenkins.

Jackie Coogan in "My Boy" will be the film feature at the Strand. "The Monte Carlo Affair," with Jon Stanley, Lew Marshall and Johnny Hudgins will be the burlesque offering at the Star.

Miss Frances White will be the vaudeville headliner at the Shubert-Crescent. Others will be Francis Renault, Tameo Kalyama, Ben Ryan and Miss Harriette Lee and Milroy.

HOLMES PHOTO STORIES.

The Burton Holmes Photo Stories of Travel begin here early in January, and his five travelogues will be given, one subject each week, in the following order: "Mexico," "Classic Japan," "Inspecting the Philippines," "Going Abroad at Home"—devoted to the beauty spots and wonderlands of the United States and Canada—and "Around the World," a comprehensive moving picture journey around the globe by a novel route, showing the "high spots" of interest and pictorial beauty. A series of colored still pictures will be shown during the intermissions between the moving pictures.

'PARISIAN' AT METROPOLITAN.

"Parisian" will be given at the Metropolitan Opera House to-morrow afternoon.

Calendar of First Nights

MONDAY.
ASTOR THEATER (Matinee)—William Faversham in a revival of Edwin Milton Royle's "The Squaw Man," with Mrs. Lydia Hoyt as Julia Hoyt making her professional debut in the legitimate.
COMEDY THEATER (Matinee)—Mme. Petrova in her own play, "The White Peacock."
CENTURY ROOF (Matinee)—"Hanky Panky Land," a holiday frolic, with Fred Heider.
MANHATTAN OPERA HOUSE (Morning)—"Red Riding Hood," Monday to Wednesday, "Cinderella," Thursday to Saturday mornings. Afternoon and evening, "Uncle Tom's Cabin."
KNICKERBOCKER THEATER (Evening)—"Bulldog Drummond," melodrama, with A. E. Matthews.
FORTY-NINTH STREET THEATER (Evening)—Leo Dietrichstein in "Face Value," opening this new Shubert playhouse to Saturday mornings.
LEXINGTON THEATER (Evening)—Fritz Leiber, starting his Shakespearean season with "Macbeth"; Tuesday, "Hamlet"; Wednesday afternoon and Thursday evening, "Romeo and Juliet"; Wednesday evening, "The Taming of the Shrew"; Friday, "Julius Caesar"; Saturday afternoon, "The Merchant of Venice"; and Saturday evening, "Richard III."

THURSDAY.
CORT THEATER—Wallace Eddinger and Miss Mary Nash in "Captain Applejack."



WILLIAM FAVERSHAM in "THE SQUAW MAN" ASTOR



"OLIVETTE" in "HANKY PANKY LAND" CENTURY ROOF

N. Y. U. Students to Act In Three Short Plays

An invitation performance by Randolph Somerville's students in dramatic art at New York University will be given the evening of December 30 at the university. The guests will include Stuart Walker, Louis Calvert and other authors and actors interested in the little theatre movement. Three plays will be given, Malcolm La Prade's new burlesque in rime, called "Checkmate," and Stuart Walker's "Nevertheless," and "Six Who Pass While the Lentils Boil." The casts:

"CHECKMATE."
Pawn.....Romulo Larralde
King.....Robert Crow
Red Queen.....Miss Katherine Lieberman
White Queen.....Miss Edwina Colville
"NEVERTHELESS."
Boy.....Miss Julia Cohn
Girl.....Miss Edwina Colville
Burglar.....Miss Edwina Colville
"SIX WHO PASS WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL."
Prologue.....Miss Miriam Stree
The Boy.....Miss Julia Cohn
The Girl.....Miss Edwina Colville
The Milkmaid.....Miss Edwina Colville
The Ballad Singer.....Romulo Larralde
The Blindman.....Sawyer Park
The Headman.....Albert Kratzman

BURLESQUE AT COLUMBIA.

"Folly Town," a burlesque production that kept the Columbia Theater crowded during its all summer run there two seasons ago, will return to that house for one week, commencing Monday afternoon. Two performances will be given Saturday evening, December 31—one starting at 7:30 and the other at 10:15. The presenting company includes Gus Pay, Johnnie Walker, Lynn Cantor, Ruth Rosemond and Virginia Ware.

MME. GILBERT'S RECITAL.

Mme. Yvette Gilbert will give her annual Christmas recital at the Neighborhood Playhouse tonight. The program traces the origin of popular songs from the fourteenth century church music to present day popular street songs. "The Madras House" will enter upon its last week at the Neighborhood next Tuesday.

Did You Hear?

About the Comedian Who Made All the Funny Noises in His New Play.

By LUCIEN CLEVELAND.

THE irascible comedian was so upset by this breach of discipline that it seemed as if he really would have difficulty in recovering himself sufficiently to go on with the play. Had not the presumptuous stage hand deliberately crossed the stage during the second act? Had he not moreover been so careless as to bump into the back drop with a force that set the skies and mountains and forests momentarily swaying backward and forward? Such a ludicrous interruption to the action in a Broadway theater was inconceivable. Things like this might happen at the opary house in Gopher Prairie, but in the metropolis, certainly not.

When the star had finished his scene, he darted with the speed of a deer to the side of the stage at which the offending employee was to emerge. He was caught. The stream of reproval set in at the full. Of all the blankety-blank outrages he had ever heard of this beat all. Molten wrath flowed from the mouth of the actor. It sputtered moreover from his lip. It looked as if the erring stage hand would live to regret his awkward bump into the landscape. Just then a look of horrified apprehension passed over the face of the comedian. Had he missed the cue? No, he distinctly heard the actor in the scene speak the words that meant it was time for the bird to sing.

For this is a pastoral play. Little birds sing and dogs bark. The star, moreover, who is an excellent mimic, makes all these little sounds himself. He is expert; then it saves a salary. So the bird sang and the dog barked and there. A benign expression came over the face of the irate star as he hurried into the wings and whistled, chirped, called and two-tweeted, just as the happy little birds do in the country when the summer sun is shining. It was a great minute for the bird—and the stage hand. Taking advantage of his captor's occupation with the bird notes the offender dashed back across the stage. The escape looked certain. But the star had kept his eye on him. He, finishing the caroling, dashed down under the stage and reached the other side just as the stage hand was preparing to disappear through the door. The star clutched the arm of the offender. Again he spluttered vehement disapproval. Protests, threats, lamentations again followed one another. Then suddenly appeared the look of pain on the face of the star. Was he too late? Had he forgotten again? No; he heard the cue again. Now he had to ring the cowbells. Seizing the bell he stepped forward in the wings. Again the look of beatific happiness did not appear. He stared and scowled at his victim. But this did not endure long. There was no time to be lost now. When the last, long, lingering shake of the cowbell had come to an end the stage hand was a block away. He had escaped. But it took the lovely pastoral sound of a play of country existence to save him.

Never a Reg'lar Model.

"Now, I never was a reg'lar model. What's the difference, anyhow? Look at the only reg'lar model ever was in the business! Did it help her, eh? It was one of the large group of so-called models that have recently invaded the stage. They are the 'Greenwich Village Folies.' Whether they are elms or poplars or not, they were all pretty enough to give John Murray Anderson's chorus its special reputation for beauty. The young woman who intimated a doubt as to the importance of being a regular model had just been speaking of Audrey Munster and the misfortunes which have recently followed her career as an actress. She has just been the victim of a manager's dishonesty in the West. She was doing a posing act in a variety theater in Florida, but the receipts disappeared surreptitiously with the impresario.

Miss Munson, who made her first appearance on the films four years ago, was really a model that deserved the name. She had posed for such well known artists as Lorado Taft, Frederic Macmonnies, Earl Porter, Sherry Fry, Karl Bitter and many others. Macmonnies modeled her as a bacchante, and she is among the angels in the stained glass windows of the Church of the Ascension.

She is said to have stood for an hour under a shower of water while Earl Porter painted her in "The Waterfall," which is hanging in the National Museum of the city of Mexico. She is "Civic Fame" on top of the Municipal Building, and was the original of "Maidenhair" in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and for "The Mother of the Nation" in the Capitol of South Carolina. She served as the model for decorations in the Morgan yacht the Covarr and as a nymph in on the edge of the pool on the grounds of the palace of Queen Wilhelmina at The Hague. Karl Bitter did this statue and also made a plaque of her for the residence of George J. Gould. But even this fame has not helped her to the theater anything but disastrous.

"Peter Pan" in London.

The season for "Peter Pan" in London is just now at its height, but there is of J. M. Barrie's famous fantasy here. The piece is the property of Charles Frohman, Inc., but the possibility of such revivals as London sees annually, has never been suggested. It is a pity that in the work that it would draw the public away from returning to the stage this season, or for that matter at any time. She is again absorbed in the possibilities of stage illumination as they are revealed in the General Electric laboratories at Schenectady. She came to her home for a while, but has returned recently to the study which absorbs her so much.

But "Peter Pan" has had in London many interpreters. It did in fact happen that the play here failed to attract the public without the cooperation of Miss Adams. Charles Frohman, convinced from the widespread interest in the work that it would draw the public whoever played the leading role, sent a company on the road. But it met with so little success that it travels soon.

Continued on Following Page.